



Diamond Wine Club

LEWIS CELLARS

Napa Valley

At one point, Randy Lewis studied to become a doctor. Before he completed his studies, the wanderlust of the professional racecar circuit beckoned to the Atlanta native, and Randy jumped into the world of racecars on a full-time basis.

Randy Lewis spent more than twenty-three years racing a varied number of cars on both international and national circuits that included Formula 3, Can Am and Indy Car racing, where he qualified for the Indy 500 on four occasions with a best finish of 13th on his record. He also got in on the emerging NASCAR scene before finally retiring in the early 1990's. "I took a long look at my surroundings," Lewis recently recalled, "and I knew I wasn't getting the best equipment with which to compete. That fact also affected the sponsors who put up the money for the racing teams. I finally decided it was time to do something else I truly loved."

The 'something else' was the winery business that Lewis and his late wife Debbie had fallen for in a major way (sadly, Debbie passed in early 2017). Debbie had deep roots in the wine industry starting with a long-term family-owned ranch in the Sacramento River Delta area to actual working relationships with the wine wholesale and retail businesses.

Randy Lewis had delved into the European wine regions while racing in Europe and always considered the wine industry as a really uplifting business that featured high caliber people and beautiful surroundings. He and Debbie had also become involved in a wine group that took wine and wineries most seriously. In 1989, the Lewis' began helping a close friend who had recently acquired an existing winery property in Napa Valley's Oakville District. This eventually became their entry into the wine business. "At one point, we started

buying fruit with the intention of making wines," Lewis related. "It took a few years and finally the first Lewis Cellars wines were ready for release."

The actual release date of the first 2,000 cases of wines was in 1992, and Randy Lewis began the job of securing more grapes for the future. He added additional long-term contracts and ordered some new vineyards planted that would increase his production.

In 1996, Lewis hired noted winemaker Helen Turley as a consultant, a move that was to prove extremely beneficial. The following year, Lewis Cellars produced its signature *Cuvée L*, the wine that Randy Lewis feels put his winery into the major leagues of the wine industry. "We only make *Cuvée L* in years we feel our product is truly superior. With the marvelous fruit of the '97 vintage, we decided to give it a try. The resulting wine was incredibly well received and represented a major breakthrough for our operation. Once it was finished, most of the people involved felt we could then compete with anybody in the valley with respect to quality."

In 1999, Debbie's son Dennis Bell joined Lewis Cellars to make the company a real family affair. Dennis' main responsibility rests with sales and marketing for the operation. Present day production is around 9,000 cases, a level that has remained constant over the past few years.

"Each winery has its own level of comfort," Lewis explained. "It's really the point where you can totally control your product with what you have on hand. At Lewis Cellars, we do everything ourselves in a manner we have found to work best for our wines."

In 2003, Lewis Cellars moved into a new winery location on Big Ranch Road, just outside the City of Napa's northern boundary.

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RANDY LEWIS & DENNIS BELL,
OWNERS

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The move was another masterpiece for the small entity that is now spoken of in the rarefied air of Napa Valley’s celebrated wineries.

In 2013, winemaker Josh Widaman (formerly of Pahlmeyer) was put in control of the winery’s production, a move that Randy Lewis feels has cemented the quality aspects of his family-owned winery. Widaman brings over twenty years of winemaking experience and had previous stints at Stags’ Leap Winery, Gloria Ferrer, and Vina Tarapaca in Chile.

Not that all of this success has affected Randy Lewis, even a little. “We still walk the vineyards each day making sure everything is done according to our instructions,” he added. “Besides, at the end of the day, there’s nothing like the feeling one gets from driving a dirty jeep.”

Lewis 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley

93 POINTS — *Wine Spectator magazine*

“Solidly built with loam and warm licorice notes melding into dark currant and blackberry compote flavors. Broad and fleshy through the finish. A bit stolid in personality, but the depth and definition is there. Best from 2020 through 2030.”

Winemaker’s Notes - Josh Widaman

“Juicy, ripe and fruitful, our 2016 Napa Valley Cabernet captures the kitchen aromas of home jam-making. Creamy vanilla and wood spice together with black plum, truffle and earth give the nose delectable character. Flush with fruit, dusky, dense and polished, the wine finishes with cushy, dark-chocolate tannins.”



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**This month’s Diamond *Plus!*
Featured Wine:**

Anthem 2014 Beckstoffer
Las Piedras Vineyard
Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley

94 Points – *Wine Spectator*

225 CASES PRODUCED

